Statement of Quality Assurance Policies and Processes
(2016-7)

1 Framework for Quality Assurance and Enhancement

1.1 The College offers degrees at Bachelor’s, Master’s and Doctoral levels, together with a number of Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas. Teaching is delivered primarily within the four Faculties (Engineering, Natural Sciences, Medicine and the Business School) and the School of Professional Development. The College quality assures its programmes within a light touch guidance framework led from the Registry and the office of the Vice Provost (Education). This incorporates local action and specificity within a broad College structure that complies with national and European guidance.

1.2 The regulations that define the College’s policy framework for managing academic standards are provided in the Academic and Examination Regulations, available online. The procedures for Student Complaints, Appeals and Examination Offences are all available publically online.

1.3 Governance, oversight and development of the quality and standards of College provision rests with the Senate, which is charged with promotion of the educational work of the university and the regulation, quality assurance and superintendence of the education and discipline of students.

1.4 The Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (QAEC) has delegated authority from Senate to oversee quality and standards and a number of committees report directly to QAEC. These are the Programmes Committee, Faculty Education Committees and the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC).

1.5 The Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (QAEC) is responsible for developing and advising the Senate on the implementation of College policies and procedures relating to quality assurance and audit of quality, taking into account national and international frameworks and codes of practice relating to academic standards and quality assurance, including the Quality Assurance Agency’s (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) - 2015.

1.6 The College’s quality assurance committee structure is outlined here.

1.7 At programme level, responsibility for academic standards and the quality of the educational experience delivered rests with the Head of Department (HoD), who develops departmental educational strategy in line with the College’s strategic goals. Thus while quality assurance is undertaken by the College Senate through the principal committees mentioned above, the responsibility for quality management and enhancement lies with individual academic departments.

1.8 A high priority is given to continuous enhancement of the quality of learning, teaching and the student experience. Methods and mechanisms employed to enhance this include student feedback, peer observation, programme monitoring and review, professional
development for staff and academic and pastoral support for students. These features are key to attracting able students, to supporting the full diversity of the student population and to maintaining the high standards of outcomes expected of Imperial graduates.

2 Approval of Undergraduate and Master’s Programmes

2.1 Proposals for new programmes of study usually originate from discussions at departmental level. All proposals for new programmes and major modifications to existing programmes are discussed in departments, and must have the approval of the Head of Department and Faculty Operating Officer before submission to the Programmes Committee. This is where proposals from departments receive detailed scrutiny and approval before submission to QAEC (who acts on behalf of Senate), and where any other major changes to programmes and assessment criteria are approved. The membership of the Programmes Committee includes representation from senior academic staff responsible for the delivery of undergraduate or postgraduate teaching in each department, thus ensuring that proposals are subject to peer review from practitioners in related discipline areas. There are also student representatives on these committees which ensures opinion from students is taken into account in the decision-making process. The College promotes multidisciplinary collaborations so in some cases proposals for new programmes may span more than one department or Faculty, in these cases, strategic approval is required before the detailed proposal can be considered.

2.2 Approval of UG and Master’s level programmes include external review. After discussion and approval within the department, the proposal is sent for external review and the department have the opportunity to revise the proposal in the light of reviewers’ comments. The next stage is scrutiny of the proposal by the Programmes Committee, as described above. Here, the programme proposal, together with the external reviewers’ reports and departmental response to the reviewers’ reports are considered. The Programmes Committee will decide, at this stage, whether to recommend to QAEC the approval of the proposal with or without modification or to reject it. Only after approval by QAEC will a programme be opened for applications. During the second or third year of operation of a new UG programme, a second stage review will take place. This involves detailed and rigorous review involving external reviewers and seeks confirmation that the original objectives of the new programme are being achieved. At Master’s level new programmes will undergo a second stage (internal) review in their second year, this focuses on the entry qualifications of the first cohort of students and their exit awards.

2.3 All new UG and Master’s programmes are required to submit a second stage review to the relevant quality committee (see 2.2) at the end of the first year (Master’s programmes) or in their second (or third) year of operation (undergraduate programmes) – see 2.2.

2.4 The full procedures for the approval of new programmes are available in the Procedures for the Approval and Review of New and Existing Undergraduate Programmes and the Procedures for the Approval and Review of Master’s Degrees. Both are available to download here.

3 Monitoring and Review of Programmes

3.1 External Examiners

3.1.1 The external examiner system and Boards of Examiners are central to the process by which the College monitors the reliability and validity of its assessment procedures and
academic standards. External examiners’ primary duties are to ensure that the standard of the College’s degrees is consistent with that of the national sector; to ensure that assessment processes measure student achievement rigorously and fairly and that the College is maintaining the academic standards set for its awards in accordance with the frameworks for higher education qualifications and applicable subject benchmark statements. External examiners gather evidence to support their judgement through the review of programme materials, approval of draft question papers, moderation of examination scripts, projects and coursework and, in some instances, through participation in *viva voce* and clinical examinations. External examiners are members of Boards of Examiners and participate in the determination of degree classifications and student progress.

3.1.2 Information about the roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to external examiners is available on the College’s external examiner website [here](#).

3.1.3 External examiners are nominated by departments and the nominations are scrutinised and approved by the Vice Provost (Education) or nominee. The College has detailed guidelines for departments on the nomination and approval of external examiners, incorporating the requirements of the QAA. All external examiners are invited to attend an Induction Day, combining a formal session of background briefing on the College academic structure, its expectations of external examiners and how it responds to external examiner reports, with an opportunity to visit the department to which they are appointed.

3.1.4 External examiners are asked to submit a written report giving detailed feedback on the assessment process and the academic standards of the awards. The reports are considered by departments who are required to provide a formal response to the comments made by the external examiner. The report, with the departmental response, is then sent to the Vice Provost (Education) for scrutiny. The Vice Provost (Education) will highlight areas where further action is required (and therefore seek further assurances from a department on the resolution of a particular problem) and will also highlight instances of good practice. In cases where further action is required, the report is then returned to the department to take appropriate action. A College wide summary report on all reports is produced and considered by the relevant Faculty Education Committee and this is subsequently reported to QAEC and Senate. Following consideration of the reports, the Registry provides feedback to external examiners.

3.2 Annual Monitoring of Undergraduate and Master’s Level Programmes

3.2.1 The Faculty Education Committees review and consider, on an annual basis, teaching provision within their departments. Departmental annual monitoring reports are considered in detail by the relevant Faculty Education Committees, who use the exercise to not only evaluate the provision but also to identify good practice that can be highlighted to QAEC and Senate for wider circulation. The review of external examiner reports is incorporated within the annual monitoring process as is the review of the management of departmental collaborative provision. From 2016-7 the existing annual monitoring process for undergraduate provision will be mirrored for Master’s level provision which has previously been reviewed at programme level on a three yearly cycle.
3.3 Research Degrees: Precept Review

3.3.1 The College’s Senate has endorsed a set of precepts governing research degree procedures, which draw together existing College regulations and QAA guidelines. These are supplemented by a set of collaborative research degree precepts, which outline the additional requirements with which departments offering collaborative programmes should comply.

3.3.2 The PRQC measures departmental practice against the precepts. These reviews are normally conducted once every three years except where a department is within one year of a periodic review in which case the key elements of the precept review are addressed within the periodic review (section 3.5 below). The PRQC not only evaluate the provision but also identify good practice that can be highlighted to QAEC/Senate for wider circulation. They also agree any follow up action required. The outcomes of the reviews are reported to Senate annually.

3.4 Periodic Review

3.4.1 The College has two procedures for departmental periodic reviews. These are found, in the Procedures for the Review of Taught Provision (currently under development) and at doctoral level, in the Procedures for the Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision. The procedures for the review of Departmental research degree provision is available at the following link.

3.4.2 Periodic reviews of departmental taught provision take place normally every five years and are closely aligned with accreditation where possible so that the same or similar documentation compiled for accreditation can be used for periodic review, thus reducing the burden placed on departments. The annual monitoring returns (and, pre-2015-6 PG programme reviews) also form part of the periodic review documentation. As part of the review, Master’s programmes are asked to demonstrate their alignment with the College’s Master’s Level Precepts which draw together existing College regulations and QAA guidelines. Periodic review of departmental research degree provision takes place normally every six years and considers departmental practice against the College’s research degree precepts (section 3.4.2). Periodic review for taught programmes has been suspended during 2015-6 and 2016-7 during the development phase of the new Academic Standards Framework.

3.4.3 In all cases, a review panel, comprising both internal and external members, a review officer as well as a student representative, is invited to spend a day in the department under review to consider documentation, meet with staff and students of the department and to see departmental facilities. The review officer will produce a report on behalf of the panel which will detail the panel’s conclusions, including any areas of good practice identified by the panel and recommendations for further enhancement. The department is then required to make a formal response to the report which will include an action plan to address the Panel’s recommendations. The confirmed report and the department’s response to the reports are considered by the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (QAECC) for taught programmes and the PRQC for research degree programmes. A report is then made to Senate and any appropriate period of follow-up agreed.
4. Collaborative Provision and Placements

Collaborative Provision

4.1 The College definition of collaborative provision (based on the QAA description) is: “all learning opportunities leading or contributing to the award of academic credit or a qualification that are delivered, assessed or supported through an arrangement with one or more organisations other than the degree-awarding body.”

4.2 The College has a number of collaborative arrangements with partner institutions/organisations for undergraduate, Master’s and research degree programmes. The College’s Register of Collaborative Provision is available here.

4.3 This webpage also provides details of the procedures, which have been established by the College to assure the quality and standards of its collaborative provision.

4.4 New Collaboration

4.4.1 The academic rationale for establishing a collaborative programme must be clearly documented and should be commensurate with the College’s mission, vision and strategy.

4.4.2 Proposals for establishing new collaborative programmes are initially considered by the Provost’s Board. The Provost’s Board is responsible for approving the proposed partner institution/organisation. Once strategic approval of a new partner has been granted, the proposal is referred to the Programmes Committee (for taught programmes) or the PRQC (for research programmes) for consideration as outlined in section 2 above. Additionally, the Committee will ensure that appropriate and proportionate due diligence enquiries have been satisfactorily undertaken.

4.4.3 The relevant Committee may recommend to QAEC approval of the proposed programme, with or without modification or may reject it.

4.4.4 Subject to QAEC approval, the Registry must arrange for an agreement to be signed by all Parties before commencement of the new programme.

4.4.5 The establishment of collaborative modules - individual modules which form part of an Imperial College award but that are taught and assessed by another institution/organisation - is covered by a separate procedure, available here. All collaborative modules must be approved by the Programmes Committee and QAEC and an agreement governing the arrangement must be signed. New partners may also need strategic approval from the Provost’s Board prior to approval from the Programmes Committee/QAEC.

4.4.6 All collaborative agreements are normally subject to renewal every five years.

5 Review of Collaborative Partnerships and Programmes

5.1 At the time of strategic approval of a new collaborative programme, the Vice Provost (Education) will also determine whether an initial site visit is needed. The nature and frequency of continuing site visits to the partner is decided by the Programmes Committee. Partnerships are normally subject to renewal every five-six years. A working
group will be convened by the Vice Provost (Education) to consider each partnership at least 12 months before an arrangement is due to expire so that appropriate action can be taken. These reviews involve the Registry, the Director of the International Office (for collaborations with institutions/organisations outside the UK), the College’s Legal Services team and the Director of the Research Office (to ensure commercial aspects arising from students’ research are up to date). The reviews which focuses on the strategic benefit of the partnership to the College, is in addition to review of the individual programmes as set out in their Memorandum of Agreement. Due diligence enquiries will, normally, also be carried out if the activities are significantly extended or if the ownership of a delivery organisation or support provider changes. The working group will make a recommendation to the Provost’s Board. Depending on the outcome of the Provost’s Board’s decision whether to continue with the partnership or not, any formal written agreements relating to the partnership may also need to be reviewed. When changes to an agreement are required the Vice Provost (Education) will decide whether a full discussion of the changes by the Programmes Committee (or PRQC) is required.

4.5.2 The routine monitoring and review of programmes incorporates a review of collaborative activity, where applicable. Additionally, departments with collaborative programmes are asked to provide information about such programmes as part of their periodic review submission and periodic review panels are invited to comment specifically on these.

4.5.3 The College has a small number of collaborative research degree programmes which are not “owned” by one department and are therefore not covered adequately by the departmental/programme level reviews. A separate review procedure has therefore been developed for such programmes and is available from at the following link.

4.6 Placements

4.6.1 The College’s Placement Learning Policy outlines the College’s definition of a placement and the responsibilities of the College to students selected and preparing for and undertaking a placement, the rights and responsibilities of placement students themselves and what is expected from placement providers. This policy is supported by a framework of Good Practice for curriculum-based placements at all levels of study and undergraduate extra-ECTS placements. The Good Practice includes the roles and responsibilities of both a Placement Manager and a Placement Tutor. All documents are available to view here.

4.6.2 The management of student exchange partnerships and agreements is dealt with in accordance with the College’s Procedure for the Establishment, Renewal & Review of Student Exchange Partners, available here. All exchange partnerships are subject to initial approval by the Faculty Education Committees (for taught programmes) and PRQC (for research programmes) as appropriate and are normally subject to renewal every five years. Initial approval or renewal of a partnership should be in place before an agreement is signed.

5. Enhancement of Student Learning Opportunities

5.1 Students are also invited to participate in surveys so that student feedback on the College and its programmes can be obtained and used to enhance provision. Survey results are considered as part of annual monitoring and periodic review but are also considered independently of these processes through the academic governance structure.
External surveys in which students participate include (but are not limited to):

- National Student Survey (NSS)
- Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

Internal surveys include (but are not limited to):

- UG SOLE lecturer/module evaluations
- PG SOLE lecturer/module evaluation
- Student Experience Survey

5.2 At College level, students are members of all quality assurance Committees and at departmental level the Staff-Student Committees provide an opportunity for students to provide feedback to their departments directly.

5.3 Students participate in periodic reviews of programmes with one representative from the ICU sabbatical team acting as a member of the review panel on undergraduate reviews and one representative from the Graduate Students’ Union (GSU) on postgraduate reviews, with other students who belong to the department under review taking part in meetings with the panel.

6. Assurance of Standards

6.1 In addition to the processes described above, the Senate and its sub-committees regularly receive and consider quantitative data on student achievement. These include degree classifications, examination failure rates and research degree submission rates.

7. Student Engagement

7.1 Staff and students work together to enhance educational provision. The student body influences on-going developments of learning opportunities. Student representatives sit on all quality assurance committees and also make an important contribution to those committees with an educational strategy focus. Briefings occur between the newly elected Sabbatical Officers and the President, Provost, Vice-Provost (Education), College Secretary and Registrar, Academic Registrar, the Director of Student Support, and senior staff within the Library. The ICU also provides specific training for its student representatives, which has been very well received.

7.2 Imperial College Union has approximately 500 academic representatives for whom it provides academic representation training. Currently, all elected academic representatives attend one of three 1.5 hour training sessions run by the Union (one for UG student representatives and two for PG student representatives). The training session includes an introduction to Union and College structure, the representation network structure and how it works, College and Union welfare services and how to be an effective student representative. Student representation handbooks are also provided. Additionally, the PG representation training includes an introduction to the Graduate School. More information about representation training provided by the Union can be found here.
7.3 An initiative, developed by the Union is “Rep Drive”. “Rep Drive” has been established by the Union to improve communication and handover arrangements between student representatives and their departments. It is an online resource so representatives can easily access mailing lists and contacts, submit Staff-Student Committee minutes, read previous Staff-Student Committee minutes, read representation and HE policies and publications, store plans and ideas and easily track progress.

7.4 Staff-Student Committees are the primary arenas for staff-student engagement at a departmental level. Staff-Student committees are run slightly differently according to the size and UG:PG ratio of the department. Most departments have separate committees for undergraduates and postgraduates. A range of issues are discussed from UG SOLE and PG SOLE results, external examiner reports and curriculum changes to practical issues, such as the availability of computers and pastoral care. Staff-Student Committees are often chaired by a student, often a Departmental Representative, who will liaise with the department and fellow students to agree an agenda for the meeting in advance.

7.5 The College’s Staff-Student Committee good practice guidelines can be found at the following link.

7.6 The student body is encouraged to provide feedback on learning opportunities through surveys such as UG SOLE, PG SOLE, PRES, PTES and NSS. Student representation on all committees where these results are discussed ensures that students work closely with staff to resolve issues raised and that any action taken is communicated back to the student body.

8. Wellbeing and Support

8.1 College student wellbeing services are the responsibility of the Director of Student Support, who reports to the Vice-Provost (Education). The Director of Student Support line manages the Head of the Student Counselling Service, the Head of the Disability Advisory Service, the College Tutors and the Hall Wardens. The Director of Student Support acts as liaison between the College and the College Health Centre (NHS) and the Chaplaincy and works closely with the ICU Deputy President (Welfare) to enhance student welfare advice and support. College Welfare services report to the Student Support and Wellbeing Committee, chaired by the Director of Student Support, which produces an annual report to Provost’s Board and advises Senate on relevant issues. The College Disability Action Committee, chaired by the College Secretary and Registrar, considers all disabilities-related issues for staff and students, develops policy and reports to the College Equality and Diversity Committee, which reports annually to Council.

9. International Students

9.1 The International Student Support team provides assistance and specialist advice on a wide range of international student issues, particularly immigration and orientation. Prior to their arrival at Imperial, international offer-holders can consult dedicated pre-arrival webpages and are sent e-newsletters to support them in preparing to come to the UK. At the beginning of each academic year, the office organises an international students’ ‘Welcome Day’ and team members facilitate a number of international orientation workshops. The Office also operates a daily quick query drop-in session throughout the year (each morning), and students can book 30–minute confidential 1:1 interviews with a trained immigration adviser from 2-4pm on most days of the week to discuss any issues of concern. All Imperial College students are members of International Students’ House, a
central venue at Great Portland Street where many events and trips are organised. In addition, International Student Support covers the booking cost of any students who wish to spend a weekend with a British family, through the HOST UK scheme. Throughout the academic year, the office keeps current students up to date with social activities and opportunities in London, as well as changes to immigration rules, through a termly e-newsletter. The team offers monthly daytrips to places of cultural interest around the UK, and other social events to facilitate integration and enhance the student experience. At appropriate intervals, workshops on immigration options post-graduation and visas to travel to Europe are organised. The Head of International Student Support sits on the College Student Support and Wellbeing Committee and liaises regularly with other College providers of support to students, as well as external stakeholders and representative organisations, such as UKCISA and UUK.